CREATIVITY IN LANGUAGE: REFLECTIONS ON POLYSEMY, METAPHORS, IDIOMS, COLLOCATIONS…AND THE LIKE

ADEL SAKAKINI
Faculty of Human Sciences, Beirut Arab University, Lebanon, adel.sakakini@bau.edu.lb

Diana Hadi
Faculty of Human Sciences, Beirut Arab University, Lebanon, drdianahadi.bau@gmail.com

CREATIVITY IN LANGUAGE: REFLECTIONS ON POLYSEMY, METAPHORS, IDIOMS, COLLOCATIONS…AND THE LIKE

Abstract

According to Ronald Carter (2011), Creativity is such a complex and protean term to define. It involves inventiveness, imagination, novelty, originality and a myriad of other aspects. In language, in particular, creativity manifests itself in humans' ability to produce an infinite number of sentences never spoken before and understand sentences never heard before or what Chomsky calls "creative aspect" of language use (Fromkin and Rodman, 1993.) It is of two types: rule-bound creativity and rule-breaking creativity. The researchers explore creativity employed in different language discourse such as slips of the pen, slips of the tongue, oxymoron, paradox, collocation, blends, anomaly, pragmatics, euphemisms, markedness and unmarkedness, puns, and text messaging.

Keywords

CREATIVITY IN LANGUAGE: REFLECTIONS ON POLYSEMY, METAPHORS, IDIOMS, COLLOCATIONS…AND THE LIKE

S. ADEL[1], H. DIANA[2]

[1] Faculty of Human Sciences, Beirut Arab University, Lebanon
[2] Faculty of Human Sciences, Beirut Arab University, Lebanon

ABSTRACT: *According to Ronald Carter (2011), Creativity is such a complex and protean term to define. It involves inventiveness, imagination, novelty, originality and a myriad of other aspects. In language, in particular, creativity manifests itself in humans' ability to produce an infinite number of sentences never spoken before and understand sentences never heard before or what Chomsky calls "creative aspect" of language use (Fromkin and Rodman, 1993.) It is of two types: rule-bound creativity and rule-breaking creativity. The researchers explore creativity employed in different language discourse such as slips of the pen, slips of the tongue, oxymoron, paradox, collocation, blends, anomaly, pragmatics, euphemisms, markedness and unmarkedness, puns, and text messaging.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Creativity in language is an interdisciplinary study as it draws different insights from a variety of disciplines: philosophy, psychology, and linguistics. Its complexity necessitates the joint efforts of different domains to address it. It has long triggered the curiosity of Chomsky to investigate into the creativity of the human mind, specifically as it manifests itself in human language use. Chomsky's concern with the creativity of the human mind has long called on the attention of critics (Den Ouden, 1975; Sampson, 1979 & 1980; and Drach, 1981). Max Black (1968) has described this aspect of language in the following way: "Users of language are free to invent new words, to invest old words with new meanings, to modify established syntactical patterns, to use the rhetorical devices of metaphor and irony, and to modify the stereotyped and routine ideas crystallized in the linguistic system For all its fixity of structure at any given time, a living language has an inherent plasticity and capacity for growth and adaptation" (p.65).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Chomsky refers (1972, p. 11) to "the 'creative' aspect of language use" as something which, he   says (1972, p. 100), manifests itself in the language user's ability to produce and understand "an indefinite number of expressions which are new to" his "experience", and to do so "on an appropriate occasion, despite their novelty and independently of detectable stimulus configurations". It can be said that the language user who produces novel sentences in a way which is appropriate to, though not determined solely by the circumstances of their use, manifests his Cartesian creativity.

According to Chomsky (1980, p.24), ordinary language use is complex and esoteric as it is beyond the scope and sequence of scientific explanation. Chomsky distinguishes what he calls (1974, p.152) "the problem of normal creativity", as it might be manifested in the Cartesian creativity of ordinary language use, from what he refers to (1966a, p. 16) as "the general problem of true creativity, in the full sense of this term". Chomsky points out (1966a: p. 84, n. 30) that one "would not refer to an act as 'creative' simply on the basis of its novelty and independence of identifiable drives or stimuli". According to Chomsky (1966a, p. 27), "true 'creativity' in a higher sense implies value as well as novelty." However, Chomsky evidently sees a relation between the phenomenon of true creativity

and that of normal (Cartesian) creativity. True creativity, like normal creativity, encompasses novelty, appropriateness to context, and unpredictability in terms of external stimuli. Furthermore, Chomsky claims (1976, p. 133) that true creativity, like the Cartesian creativity of ordinary language use, "is predicated on", but not of course comprehensively, profoundly or thoroughly explainable in terms of, "a system of rules and forms, in part determined by intrinsic human capacities". Moreover, Chomsky's claim that the acquisition of a capacity for Cartesian creativity in ordinary language use depends on the availability to the language learner of a restraining schemata or prior knowledge for the construction of grammars is reflected in true creativity. Accordingly, Chomsky suggests (1976, p. 123) that the likelihood of true human creativity depends on the fact that "other cognitive systems too set limits on human intellectual development, by virtue of the very structure which makes it possible to acquire rich and comprehensive systems of belief and knowledge."

Therefore, according to Chomsky, true human creativity involves novelty, appropriateness to context, unpredictability in terms of environmental circumstances, and value. Chomsky furthermore claims (1973, p. 183) that true creativity "takes place within a system of constraints and governing principles".

The most broadly distinguished characteristic of the created product is its novelty or what is known by innovation, originality or uniqueness. To begin with, the created product is sometimes held to be novel in the sense that no method or set of rules or recipe available to the producer before its production could have sufficed to determine the activities of that producer. Similarly, Koesfler suggests (1964: p. 209) that "the problems which lead to original discoveries are precisely those which cannot be solved by any familiar rule of the game." Tomas argues (1964, p. 98), likewise, that we do not "congratulate an artist for being creative" simply "because he was able to obey rules that were known before he painted his picture or wrote his novel or poem". In conclusion, then, a created product is novel in the sense that the activities involved in its production were not determined solely by pre-existent rules or methods.

Second, the created product is occasionally regarded as novel in the sense that we could not, before its production, have predicted what characteristics it would have. Equally, Rothenberg and Hausman claim (1976, p. 23) that the "specific natures" of created products "cannot be predicted from a knowledge of their antecedents".

Third, the created product is sometimes held to be novel in the sense that it is different in kind from previously created products in the same domain. "To be creative", according to Sampson (1979, p. 105), "is to produce something which falls outside the class of any set of principles that might have been proposed to account for previous examples." Or, as Briskman says (1980: p. 96), "really outstanding creative achievements have a habit of breaking, in important ways, with the tradition out of which they emerged." In a nutshell, the created product is novel in the sense that it is incompatible with any set of standards which could have been inferred from previous creative practice in the same domain.

A forth remarkable characteristic of the created product is its exemplariness. Koestler suggests (1964, p.380) that true creativity results in the "invention of a new recipe" which can be used by others. Accordingly, then, a product is creative only if it can serve as a model for others.

Finally, it has been suggested that the created product is an appropriate, but non-random, response to the circumstances of its production. Briskman, for instance, claims (1980, p. 98) that "one of the most striking features about" created "products is their appropriateness, the 'internal connection' which exists between these products and the backgrounds against which they emerge". To sum it up, a product is creative only if, or only to the extent to which, it is an appropriate and non-random response to the circumstances in which it is produced.

To wrap it up, our beliefs about true human creativity are the following: the created product is novel, exemplary, and appropriate to the demands of the situation in which it is produced; while the creative process is neither random nor fully determined by antecedently available rules or recipes.

There are many motives behind creative language use in common everyday speech: offering some new way of interpreting the content of the message; inducing laughter by making humorous remarks; highlighting what is communicated; expressing a particular attitude; making the speaker's identity more manifest; playing with language for purposes of entertainment; closing a talk and beginning another; or "simply oiling the wheels of the conversation." (Carter and McCarthy, 2004).

3. SYNTACTIC, PRAGMATIC AND SEMANTIC CREATIVITY

Syntactic, pragmatic and semantic creativity will be explored in the following section. Firstly, syntactic creativity, or Chomsky's rule-governed creativity, refers to the capacity of formal grammars to generate an infinite series of syntactic strings. Secondly, pragmatic creativity which means that a speaker is able to produce utterances which are appropriate to the situation in which the speaker is placed; it attempts to account for the variety, relevance and cohesiveness of language uttered in a particular situation. Thirdly, semantic creativity, which refers to the capacity of speakers to produce utterances which appear to be totally novel in their semantic content and typically break a rule of language, especially a syntactic rule; neologisms and metaphors are examples of this kind of creativity.

Special features of the use of metaphor are summarized briefly by Mooij briefly below (1976, p.12): (1) Metaphor allows language to be extended to cope with novel situations for which there is no existing term. (2)Metaphors work because the denotation and connotation of the literal expression are carried over into the metaphor in some way. (3)Metaphors are an economic device of language and make unnecessary an infinitely large vocabulary; however, they are often misinterpreted. (4)Metaphors are like the (conceptual) models of science which assist in exploring new situations. They may be fundamental to our struggle to interpret the world and certainly aid this struggle at various times. (5) Metaphors may express new insights into existing situations. As a metaphor interprets and thereby constructs or structures a new situation, so it destroys an existing construction. For example, in a famous line from Romeo and Juliet Romeo proclaims, "Juliet is the sun." "My brother is the black sheep of the family," is a metaphor because he is not a sheep, nor is he black. However, we can use this comparison to describe an association of a black sheep with that person. A black sheep is an unusual animal, which typically stays away from the herd, and the person being described shares similar characteristics. Below are some more conventional metaphors we often come across:

- My brother was boiling mad. (This implies he was too angry.)
- The assignment was a breeze. (This implies that the assignment was not difficult.)
- It is going to be clear skies from now on. (This implies that clear skies are not a threat and life is going to be without hardships)
- The skies of his future began to darken. (Darkness is a threat; therefore, this implies that the coming times are going to be hard for him.)
- Her voice is music to his ears. (This implies that her voice makes him feel happy)

Polysemy or lexical ambiguity is the essence of descriptive semantics. New meanings result from creative intuitions. As Ricoeur concludes: "A semantic innovation is a way of responding in a creative fashion to a question presented by things." In a certain speech, dialogue or conversation, in a given social milieu or setting and at a precise moment, something seeks to be said that demands an operation of speech, speech working on language, that brings words and things face to face (1978a, p.125). The use of the word "fair" to mean light complexions, exhibition, just, pale, average, mediocre, as well as in the expression fair and square reflects creativity in language use.

However, Billow does include the 'metaphor as polysemy" view of Ullman, which other theorists ignore, and emphasizes metaphor's relevance to creativity, suggesting, amongst others, the following points:

- Metaphor is "the creative response in miniature" (p.83)
- Metaphor satisfies the four criteria of creativity, i.e. unusualness, appropriateness, innovation and condensation of meaning (p.83)
- Metaphor may be used to identify creative persons. (p.83)
- Metaphor has a heuristic value in both science and arts (p.83)

Metaphor is a model of language use which is the result of a novel mental construct being encoded into a linguistic signal. It may be described as linguistically creative because a metaphor is constructed by "breaking some of the rules of language." Any rule-governed activity runs the risk of having its rules broken; in the case of metaphor, meaning is produced by breaking the rules. Some examples of metaphor are: (1) the Rhine is a sewer; (2) the Rhine is the aorta of Europe; (3) the Rhine is the mother of Holland.

Semantic creativity, in the case of metaphor, makes possible the extension of meaning in language. Without the regenerative process of metaphor, our language would collapse or become reduced to a stock of basic meanings,

adequate only to cover the literally direct requirements of the day. If a computer were to be programmed with the literal, dictionary meanings of English and without the pragmatic rule of co-operation between language users, then that might be English without metaphor.

Metaphor, as a mechanism of language, works by breaking the rules of language. The resulting anomaly is a signal for the listener to apply the Overriding Rule in order to determine a meaning. Therefore, metaphor is a pragmatic mechanism. The anomaly which triggers the application of the Overriding Rule may be at word-level or at sentence-level as in the following:

- "Bachelor girl". lexical anomaly
- "The old warhorse is starting to slow down" (referring to the Prime Minister) -- semantic anomaly.

Metaphor is the mechanism used to express meaning which cannot be lodged or held within the standard rules for expressing meaning. The intended meaning is usually novel in that it has not been expressed before. The particular expression which results may become an institutionalized part of language - an idiom.

Metaphor resides on the border between competence and performance. It is totally dependent on (breaking) the rules of the grammar At the same time, it is dependent on the Overriding Rule (a pragmatic rule) which is an aspect of usage. Therefore, it can easily be described as a peripheral grammatical mechanism.

The most figurative language that represents creativity in language is metaphor. We have excluded syntactic creativity as a misnomer or an inaccurate designation. We have excluded pragmatic creativity because, following Chomsky (1980), it can be seen to relate to abstract structures in the brain related to a set of concepts, rather than to language. As in for instance, one's pragmatic sense of language tells him/her if the traffic light is red and there is no traffic and no policeman, to proceed and move. Semantic creativity seems the most fruitful area of investigation, and as a part of this, metaphor is a well-studied device for semantic innovation.

De Beaugrande's definition of creativity, takes into account that the process of meaning-creation is not solely restricted to linguistic activities: it reflects two vital aspects of the process. Firstly, it points out that creativity is the reconstruction of a given reality. This implies that there must first be awareness of that reality, but also the awareness of the possibilities for changing that reality. In the case of language, the given realities are the systematic facts of language. Once they are perceived as a system of rules and elements, that knowledge can be utilized or made use of. Secondly, the definition emphasizes that the process must be a public process. Unless the derivation of the reconstructed reality is accessible to others, it remains an peculiar construction, without public meaning and unlikely to be of lasting value. It will cease or stop to exist when its creator ceases to-exist.

It is demonstrably obvious that language is creative and has been commented upon by most theorists. However, it has never been a formal part of linguistic description, except in the minor sense of within-system creativity which is a formal function of any system based on rules and elements. Creativity is a formal aspect of a complex intersystem, where the rules and elements of each system are subject to modification in the light of the rules and elements of other systems. There is a vast range between the literally meaningful and the meaningless. This range is the inspiration for wisdom, comedy, and beauty. It is made possible by the systematic nature of language, but uses this systematicity by breaking it. It is a vastly productive capacity made by language, but is not itself directly a part of language.

All the rules and elements of the system are subject to alteration or adjustment, thus immensely increasing the expressive power of the system. Theoretically, it might be possible to specify all the modifications which are possible. However, the resultant figure would be meaninglessly large; and possibly indefinitely large because of the open-ended nature of some systems. This illustrates once again the abundant and diverse resources at the disposal of the language user. It is a matter of skill and talent that the creative language user can produce texts which exploit this resource. In one sense of the word, such texts are more meaningful and therefore, more significant than normal every-day uses. That is why such creative language use is thoroughly interesting. It is, then, a matter for artistic assessment whether such usage is successful or not.

4. EXAMPLES ON LANGUAGE CREATIVITY

Repetition is a very good example of talking and creating. It reflects "a more subtle token of a relationship, not just between utterances or turns but between speakers, the main purpose often being to co-construct interpersonal convergence and to creatively adapt to the other speaker(s)." (Carter and McCarthy, 2004). According to Tannen (1989), repetition is a key component in the poetics of talk: "Repetition is a resource by which conversationalists together create a discourse, a relationship, and a world. It is the central linguistic meaning-making strategy, a limitless resource for individual creativity and interpersonal involvement." The example below from (Carter and McCarthy, 2004, p.64) illustrates it clearly in a conversation between three speakers (S 01, S 02, and S 03):

1. *(S 02) (Laughs) cos you come home*
   (S 03) I come home
   (S 02) You come home to us

2. *(S 03) Sunday is a really nice day I think*
   (S 02) It certainly is
   (S 03) It's a really nice relaxing day

3. *(S 03) I reckon it looks better like that*
   (S 02) And it was another bit as well, another dangly bit
   (S 03) What, attached to
   (S 02) The top bit
   (S 03) That one
   (S 02) Yeah. So it was even
   (S 03) Mobile earrings
   (S 01) I like it like that. It looks better like that

A creative use occurs in 3 in the word mobile which is metaphorically linked with the word "earrings". There is a pun on the meaning of "mobile" either meaning capable of movement or the fixture of a mobile meaning either a slightly dangling object which is normally placed over a child's bed or cot to provide distraction or entertainment or a piece of art. The above extracts 1-3 involve repetition across speaking turns, lexical and grammatical repetition (the repetition of the word bit and like), repetition of the deictic determiner "that" in extract 3, pronominal repetition with variation (extract 1), and phonological repetition with variation (for example, bit and better in extract 3). However, the main creative functions are in the dialogic building of relationships and accord between the speakers (Carter and McCarthy, 2004).

Idioms, or groups of words whose meaning cannot be explained using the literal meanings of the individual words that constitute them, resemble creativity in the native speakers' assembly of words as in the meaning they attributed to them. The following, among a myriad of other examples, reflect this clearly: "good as gold"to refer to something cherished or considered priceless, "kick the bucket" to refer to the death of someone, "out of the frying pan into the fire" to describe bad situations which became worse, and "glass ceiling" to refer to a barrier to women's professional advancement.

Collocations, which describe associations between vocabulary items that have a tendency to co-occur, such as combinations of adjectives and nouns or verbs and nouns as in real-estate agent, make mistakes, inclement weather, set the alarm,…all these and many more help a writer or a speaker be creative in the sense that he/she is accurate in using the right words that send the intended meaning.

An acronym, an abbreviation formed from the initial letters of other words and pronounced as a word, is another form of language creativity. It is more practical, easier for articulation and most importantly memorable especially with lengthy names. Examples on acronyms are: PC for personal computer, WHO for World Health Organization, and BBC for British Broadcasting Corporation.

A paradox, or a seemingly contradictory statement, exemplifies a great deal of language creativity. For instance, when Winston Churchill told his driver paradoxically: "Don't speed up; I'm in a hurry," he confused him.

Tongue twisters, which are a sequence of words or sounds that are difficult to pronounce quickly and correctly, reflect a great deal of creativity in language. The following examples illustrates different instances of creativity:

Example 1
She sells sea-shells on the sea-shore.
The shells she sells are sea-shells, I'm sure.
For if she sells sea-shells on the sea-shore
Then I'm sure she sells sea-shore shells.

Example 2
Betty Botter bought a bit of butter.
The butter Betty Botter bought was a bit bitter
And made her batter bitter.
But a bit of better butter makes better batter.
So Betty Botter bought a bit of better butter
Making Betty Botter's bitter batter better

This creativity above in using similar sounds or words with different meanings has many benefits:

- They strengthen the articulation and pronunciation of words.
- They help reporters/ journalists speak at an incredible pace when reporting an incident.
- They are one of the means of learning a language without getting bored.
- They help you improve fluency in the language.
- Many tongue twisters contain similar sounding words/phrases with different meanings.

This leads to another benefit of improving one's vocabulary.

5. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussion of creativity in language and, as a special case of this creativity, metaphor, has shown that any conception of language that is confined to an "elements-and-rules" description is unable to account for certain language phenomena. Only if language is seen as a system of various independent systems, can a reasonable explanation be made of phenomenon such as metaphor. This conclusion suggests that language is a far more complex and sophisticated arrangement than the common linguistic view has suggested to date.

Linguistics has developed, and grown into a range of specialized inquiries, with few scholars acquainted with detailed knowledge outside their own area of expertise as very few have made use of interdisciplinarity to tackle the complexities of language. Eventually, it will be necessary for an miscellaneous effort of synthesis to be made. This is so because linguistics has a common objective for all its various inquiries: to understand language. Even as any one particular inquiry may aim to understand only a small component of language, there is an unspoken acceptance that the ultimate aim is to understand the whole. Creativity, in general, and metaphor, in particular, can only be approached by a linguistics that is aware and vigilant of context and text.

It is not at all definite what a thoroughly formal description of the creative capacity of language would be like since we are dealing with intersystem relations which are based on meaning.

REFERENCES

- Billow, R. M. (1977) "*Metaphor*", Psychological Bulletin, 84, 81-92.
- Black, M. (1962) Models and Metaphor Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- Black, M. (1968) The Labyrinth of Language Mentor, New York.
- Brooks, C. (1965) "Metaphor, Paradox and Stereotype", British Journal of Aesthetics, 5, 315-328.
- Carter and McCarthy (2014). Talking, Creating: Interactional Language, Creativity, and Context. Applied Linguistics 62-88. Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Chomsky, N. (1957) Syntactic Structures, Mouton, The Hague.
- Chomsky, N. (1964) Current Issues in Linguistic. Theory, Mouton, The Hague.
- Chomsky, N. (1965) Aspects of the Theory of Syntax, M.I.T. Press, The Hague.
- Chomsky, N. (1966) Topics in the Theory of Generative Gramuiar, Mouton, The Hague.
- Chomsky, N. (1966) Cartesian Linguistics, Harper and Row, New York.
- Chomsky, N. (1968) Language and Mind,New York: Harcourt.
- Chomsky, N. (1972) Studies in Semantics in Generative Grammar, Mouton, The Hague.
- Chomsky, N. (1972) Problems of Knowledge and Freedom, London: Barrie and Jenkins.
- Chomsky, N. (1973) For Reasons of State, New York:Pantheon.
- Chomsky, N. (1976) Reflections on Language, Fontana, Glasgow.
- Chomsky, N. (1977) Essays on Form and Interpretation,New York:North Holland.
- Chomsky, N. (1979) Language and Responsibility, New York:Pantheon.
- Chomsky, N. (1980) Rules and Representations, Oxford:Blackwell.
- De Beaugrande, R. (1978) "Linguistics and Creativity" Interdisciplinary Conference on Linguistics, Louisville, April 1978.
- De Beaugrande, R. (1979) .Introduction to Text. Linguistics,London:Longmans.
- Den Ouden, B. (1975) Language and Creativity P. De Ridder Press, Lisse.
- Mooij, J.J.A. (1976) A Study of Metaphor, Amsterdam: North Holland.
- Ricoeur, P. (1978 a), The Rule of Metaphor, London:Kegan Paul,.
- Ricoeur, P. (1978 b) "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination and Feeling", Critical Inquiry, Autumn, 1978, 143-159.